



## *Committee on International Justice and Peace*

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: [WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD](http://WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD) • FAX 202-541-3339

February 19, 2014

Ms. Susan Rice  
National Security Advisor  
National Security Council  
Washington, DC

Dear Advisor Rice:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to express my ongoing serious concern for the situation in South Sudan and to share with you a recent Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of South Sudan. The Exhortation is a striking declaration coming from a Conference of Bishops that lived through decades of civil war during which some 2 million of their people were killed.

The bishops lay the blame for the crisis squarely on leaders who have personalized power, used their positions for profit, and abandoned political debate and dialogue to pursue military solutions through the creation of personal militia. In such a situation, South Sudan can no longer return to business as usual. They call for a new South Sudan that cannot return to the way things were on December 15, 2013, when the crisis began.

In charting the way to a new nation, the bishops urge their government and its partners to:

1. Include the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) and civil society in all future negotiations. Prior to the negotiations that led to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, the churches initiated the Wunlit People to People Peace Process that eventually brought the leaders of different liberation movements together to present a unified stand in preparation for the CPA negotiations. In 2013, the SCC were entrusted with the National Committee on Healing, Peace and Reconciliation. The SCC has negotiated peace deals involving armed leaders like George Athor and David Yau Yau, but they have been excluded from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) talks. A new, transformed nation cannot be built if the work is entrusted only to the very people who instigated the crisis. Civil society, and in particular the SCC, are essential to a lasting solution and renewed direction and should be at the negotiating table.
2. Build better governance to promote the common good and services for people living in poverty. This will be crucial to preparing a free and fair election in 2015.
3. Support fully the work of the National Committee on Healing, Peace and Reconciliation. Urge government ministries and the army to take up their obligation to heal the wounds of the past. This work would also include support to agencies like Catholic Relief Services (CRS). CRS is assisting the Church to build peace in Jonglei State.
4. Reform the armed forces, reducing their role in politics, making them less of a financial burden on the country, building cohesion and unity, and promoting greater respect for the human rights of their people and less of a threat to national security.

Letter to National Security Advisor Rice

February 19, 2014

Page 2

Paragraph 30 of the Exhortation is particularly powerful. The bishops eloquently describe how the country must now govern itself if it is to emerge from this crisis as a stronger and more unified nation with leaders who can stand alongside men like Nelson Mandela and Julius Nyerere. It is essential that the United States and the international community build strategic partnerships with the Churches, civil society and free press in South Sudan in order to support this vision of a new South Sudan.

I made a solidarity visit to South Sudan in August last year and have plans to visit again in July. Our Conference of Bishops renews its commitment to work with the Church in South Sudan as it pursues its prophetic role in building peace and promoting reconciliation and integral human development in South Sudan. Catholic Relief Services, our relief and development agency, has a major presence in South Sudan and I urge you to increase your partnership with them to support their work with the Church and other elements of civil society.

Sincerely yours,

+ 

Most Reverent Richard E. Pates

Bishop of Des Moines, Iowa

Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Encl: Pastoral Exhortation of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of South Sudan